

05/11/2004

## Task Force Tackles Homeland Security Funding

Contact: [Jason Feuchtwanger](#)  
Office of Communications

Contact: [Christine LaPaille](#)  
Office of Communications

**Members of the Homeland Security Funding Task Force continue to meet to examine the grant funding process in an effort to ensure a more efficient distribution of homeland security funds to state and local first responders. Meanwhile, a recent DHS Inspector General's audit supported the states contention that any delay is due to 'assessing the terrorist threat and setting priorities,' rather than unnecessary logjams at any one level of government.**

The Homeland Security Funding Task Force, a group composed of state, county, city and tribal representatives, gathered for its first meeting in Washington on March 29. Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, the chair of the task force and NGA's co-lead governor on homeland security, and Akron Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic, the vice chair, welcomed fellow task force members, including NGA Chairman Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne, Virginia Gov. Mark Warner, Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner, the other co-lead governor, as well as representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The task force, created by Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, is charged with determining what happens after states have obligated federal money for first responders. The group has pledged to look at the successes and failures at all levels of the funding process. By identifying possible challenges, the task force will be better equipped to develop cohesive solutions and strategies to make the process more effective. Some members of the task force will look at locating the money that is currently in the pipeline. At the same time, other members will study the procurement and purchasing side, paying close attention to innovative approaches and best practices, in states like **Idaho, South Carolina** and **Utah**, as well as localities.

"This task force is an important step toward securing our nation," said Gov. Romney, after Secretary Ridge announced the creation of the group. "I look forward to working with the Department in this crucial mission of better preparing American communities against the threat of terrorism."

Early this summer, the task force expects to provide Secretary Ridge with recommendations on how to expedite the grant distribution process. During their March meeting, members established a direction and structure for the task force's work. The task force will begin by looking at five states - **Delaware, Idaho, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Virginia** - so governors in those states can examine the way in which they organize and distribute grants, while also asking municipalities to do the same. Recently, five more states - **California, Florida, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio and New York** - and **Guam** were added to the survey that went out April 12. The 11 states and one U.S. territory will work with select localities and counties to examine the process at all levels of government. DHS is expected to present the results of the survey at the task force's third meeting on May 12 in Washington.

Because no two states or localities manage the funds quite the same way, there has been considerable misunderstanding about Homeland Security grants. States have to follow the same rules as municipalities in applying for reimbursement from the DHS Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP). The grant allocations are designed to cover two years of preparedness development and are good for equipment, training and planning. To date, the bulk of spending

has been on equipment purchasing. The ODP grant process requires states to submit an application, request local governments conduct comprehensive needs assessments, and purchase equipment. Only after equipment is received are states or localities eligible for reimbursement from ODP.

"With little prior technical assistance, it has taken stakeholders considerable time to understand the complexity of the grant process," said Gerard Murphy, the director of NGA's Homeland Security and Technology Division. "With checks and balances at every turn, the fact is, this is a two-year grant program that, by its very nature, is designed to be deliberate. No one level of government is at fault for slowing down the allocation of funds, because at each stage of the process, governments - local, county, state and federal - must deal with a variety of laws and due process."

The IG's report backs up this point. Focusing on whether states and localities have actually spent the available funding provides a distorted picture of homeland security preparations because it does not consider planning needs, the report suggests. Instead, the IG asserts DHS should focus on the percentage of dollars the states have obligated to localities. **Ohio** and **Pennsylvania**, for example, have obligated more than 98 percent of their grant awards, and yet, localities had drawn down eight to 36 percent of the funds.

At their March meeting, members agreed to do a better job of educating themselves and the public about the grant administration process. The task force offers continuing education for all its members and fosters a more open dialogue. The renewed collaboration should reduce the tension and confusion between state and local partners over the speed with which federal grant money is allocated to municipalities. And, most importantly, it will accomplish the shared goal of making America safer.